Executive Summary

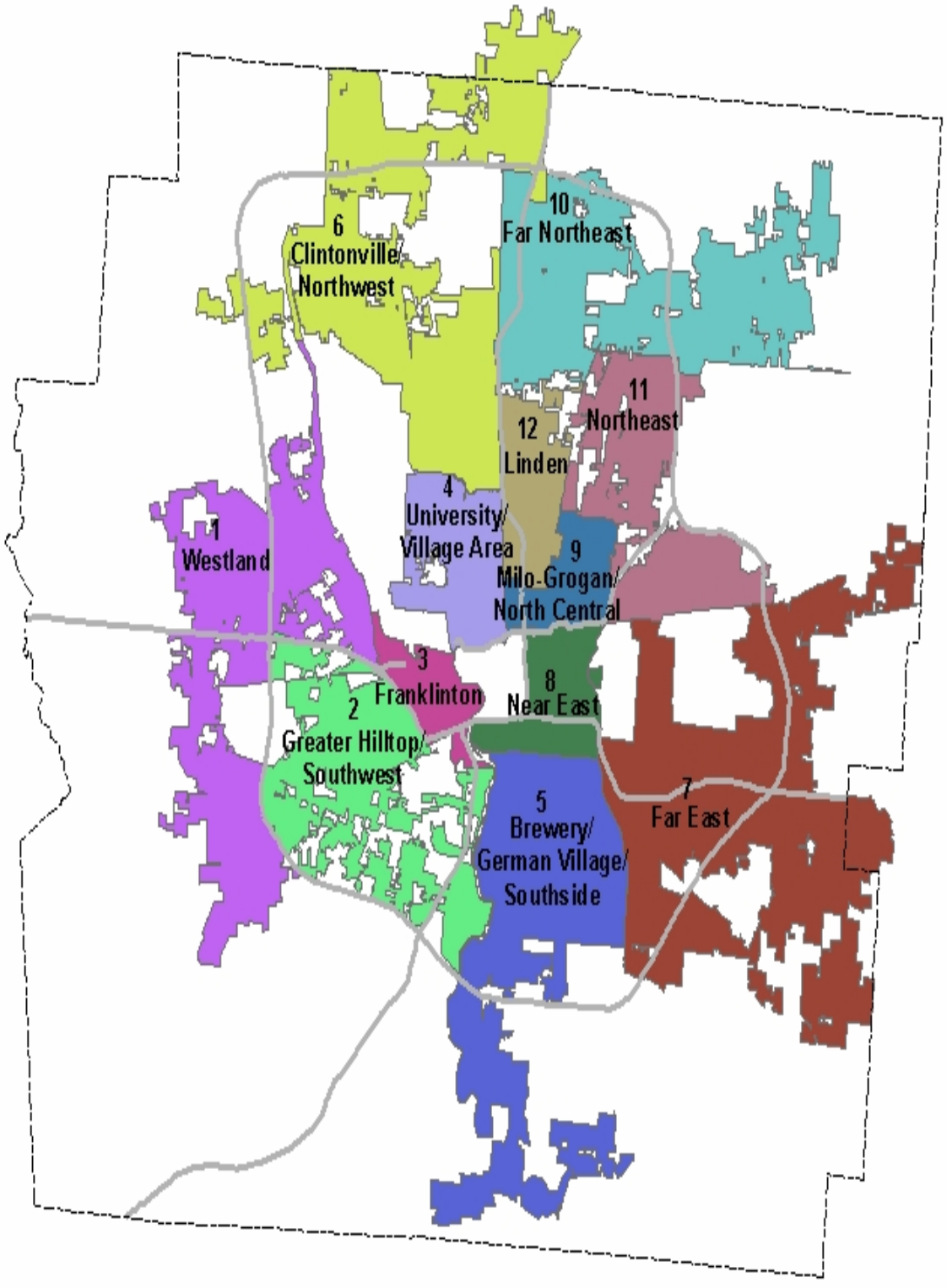
For the past two decades, citizens across the United States have increasingly demanded better quality public services for their tax dollars. Continued pressure to improve and document government performance lead the City of Columbus to become one of the first metropolitan Midwestern cities to implement a citizen satisfaction survey in 1994. Unlike many other cities, however, the City of Columbus has remained committed to using citizen satisfaction data as a means to assess and improve the management of city services. In particular, the City uses the results from the survey to track its progress towards achieving the goals outlined in the Columbus Covenant. In addition, the results serve as a measure for individual departments as they assess whether they are meeting department level performance measures. Based on data from subsequent satisfaction surveys in 1995, 1996, 1998, and 2000, the City is able to track the quality of various public services and target areas for improvement.

This year, 2002, the City of Columbus is once again a pioneer in urban government management. The implementation of the 2002 survey marks a significant shift in how the survey data are collected, analyzed, and reported. To date the City of Columbus has only been able to use the survey data to assess service quality across the entire city or in imprecise comparisons between the central city and suburban areas. The 2002 survey gathered responses by each of the City's 12 service districts. Figure ES.1 on the next page displays these districts. Consequently, the information included in this report can be used not only to assess whether services are improving or declining relative to past years, but also whether there are important performance differences across districts that deserve attention. Columbus is one of only a handful of cities nationwide that utilize this cutting edge tool.

The remainder of the Executive Summary reports the following highlights from the survey results:

- Quality of life ratings
- City service ratings over time
- Service district variation in service quality
- Columbus' most important challenges
- Examples from the Columbus Covenant's Strategic Goals
- Examples from individual departments

Figure ES.1
Columbus' 12 Service Districts

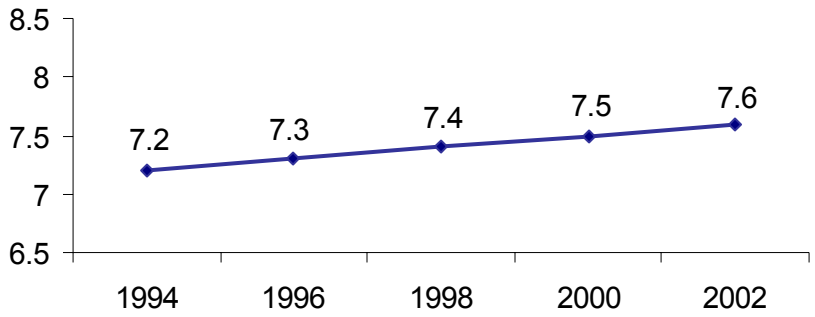


1. Quality of Life Ratings

Quality of life continues to improve…

Every two years since the first survey in 1994, respondents report a gradual increase in the overall quality of life in the City of Columbus. On a 10-point scale where 1 means "very poor quality" and 10 means "very high quality," the average rating in 2002 is 7.6 as compared with 7.2 in 1994, 7.3 in 1996, 7.4 in 1998, and 7.5 in 2000. Figure ES.2 reports these results graphically.

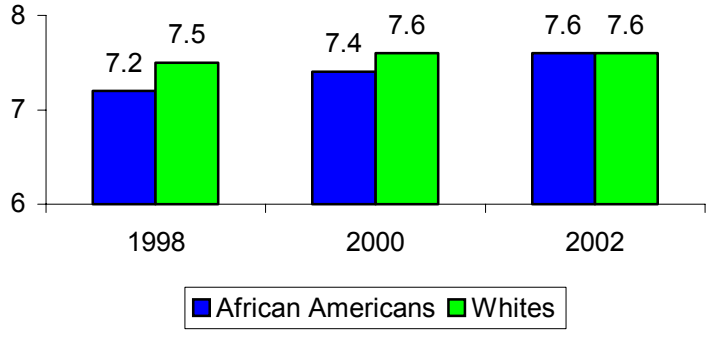
Figure ES.2
Average Quality of Life Rating in Columbus
1994-2002



...and the quality of life gap between African Americans and whites has disappeared.

Over this time period, quality of life ratings have increased for both African American and white respondents. The average quality of life rating for African American respondents in 2002 is 7.6, up from 7.4 in 2000 and 7.2 in 1998. Similarly, the average quality of life rating for white respondents is also 7.6, the same as in 2000, but up from 7.5 in 1998. In terms of average quality of life ratings the gap between African Americans and whites has disappeared. Figure ES.3 reports quality of life ratings for both African Americans and whites.

Figure ES.3
Quality Life by Race



2. City Service Ratings over Time

Citizen evaluation of the quality of public services is a key benchmark of government performance. As primary consumers of public services, citizens are well positioned to assess whether they are receiving value for their tax dollars. Since the first survey in 1994, the City of Columbus has asked residents to evaluate the quality of several public services. Citizens have been asked to rate services on a 10-point scale, where 1 means "very poor quality" and 10 means "very high quality." Table ES.1 reports the ratings from 1996 to 2002. Overall, service performance continues to improve. The average service rating is 7.2, up from 7.0 in 1996. Twelve services have higher average service ratings than the previous survey in 2000, while only three services show any drop-off.

Service quality continues to improve across the board.

Table ES.1
Quality of Columbus City Services
1996-2002

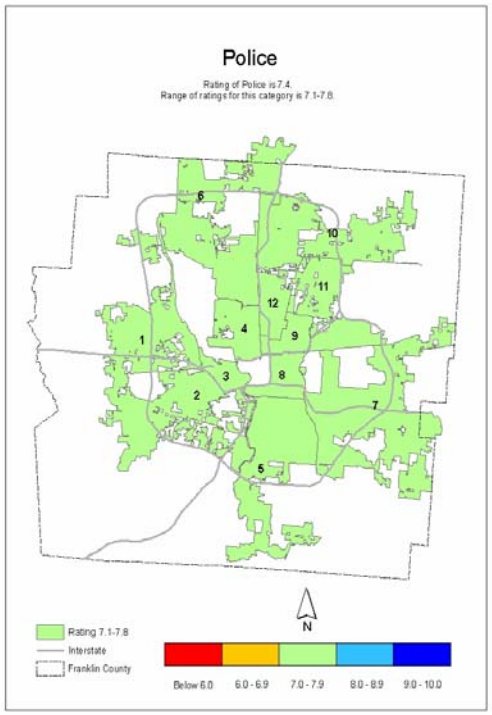
	1996	1998	2000	2002	
Fire Services	8.5	8.4	8.4	8.6	▲
Emergency Medical Services	8.3	8.1	8.3	8.5	▲
Weekly Garbage Collection	7.5	7.9	7.8	8.1	▲
City Parks in General	7.1	7.2	7.7	7.6	▼
City's Recreational Programs	6.9	7.0	7.4	7.5	▲
Police Services	7.1	7.0	7.1	7.4	▲
Bulk Trash Collection	6.4	7.0	7.2	7.4	▲
Parks in Your Neighborhood	6.8	6.9	7.6	7.3	▼
Yard Waste Collection	--	6.9	7.0	7.2	▲
Drinking Water	6.7	6.4	6.6	6.8	▲
Sewers & Drainage	6.7	6.8	6.7	6.8	▲
Cleanliness of Roads & Streets	--	6.5	6.6	6.6	□
Snow Removal	5.4	6.0	5.7	6.4	▲
Condition of Columbus Streets	5.4	5.6	5.5	6.3	▲
Condition of Neighborhood Streets	5.9	6.2	6.5	6.3	▼
Collection of Recyclables	--	6.0	6.0	6.2	▲
Average Service Rating	**7.0**	**7.1**	**7.1**	**7.2**	▲

3. Service District Variation in Service Quality

As noted earlier, one of the unique advantages of the 2002 survey is that data are collected and reported across the 12 service districts. Consequently comparisons can be made not only over time, but also across service districts. This information will improve the ability of the City to identify districts that need attention and better mobilize resources to address problems that vary across the City. Examples are presented for three of the services reported in Table ES.1 – Police (Figure ES.4), Neighborhood Parks (Figure ES.5), and Neighborhood Streets (Figure ES.6). Different colors are used to report different categories of ratings as follows:

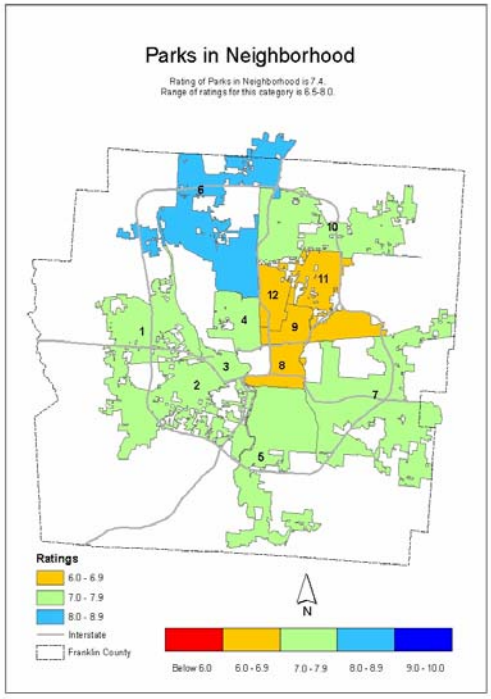
Dark Blue	**9.0 - 10.0**
Light Blue	**8.0 - 8.9**
Light Green	**7.0 - 7.9**
Orange	**6.0 - 6.9**
Red	**5.0 - 5.9**

Figure ES.4



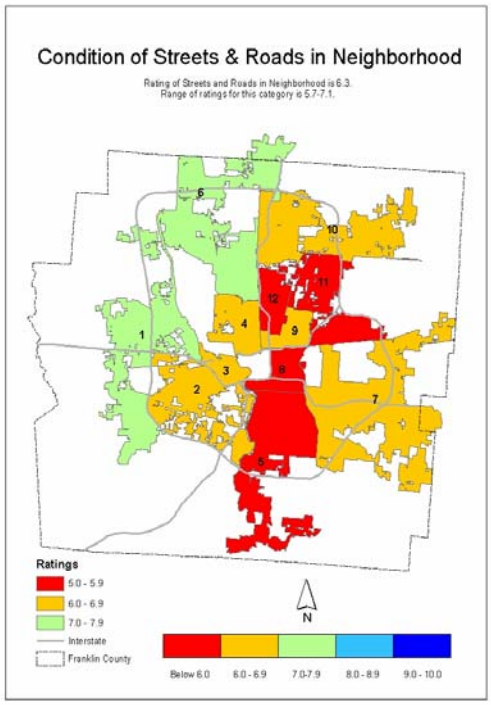
Note that there is very little variation in ratings of quality for Police services across the 12 service districts. All the districts report ratings around the citywide average of 7.4.

Figure ES.5



Now variation is apparent across districts. The Clintonville/ Northwest (6) district reports ratings for neighborhood parks, just above the citywide average of 7.4, while the Near East (8), North Central (9), Northeast (11) and Linden (12) districts report ratings just below the citywide average.

Figure ES.6



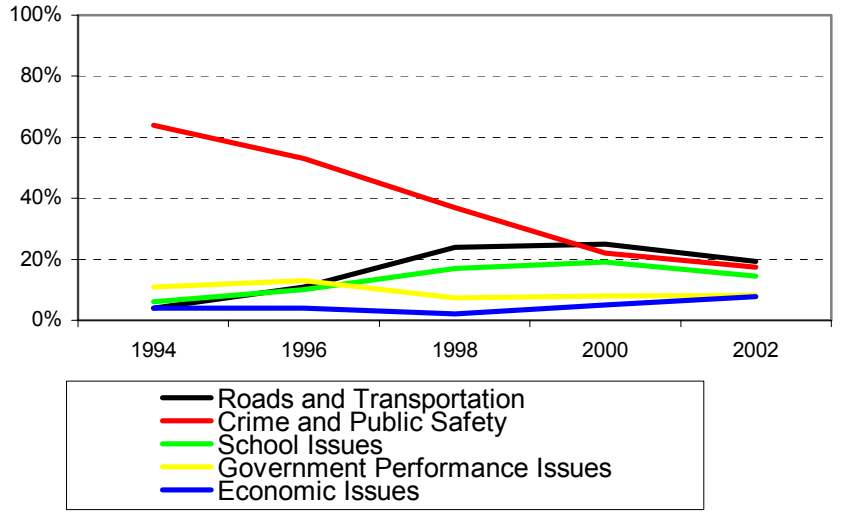
Even more geographic variation is apparent for neighborhood streets. Two districts – Westland (1) and Clintonville/Northwest (6) – report ratings above the average of 6.3, while four districts – Brewery/German Village/Southside (6), Near East (8), Northeast (11), and Linden (12) – report ratings below the citywide average.

4. Columbus' Most Important Challenges

While respondents are increasingly satisfied with their quality of life, they also report that there are important challenges facing Columbus that must be addressed to ensure continued overall satisfaction. Some of these are issues that the City of Columbus can work to improve, like the quality of roads and transportation. In other cases the City has fewer means to improve conditions, like the condition of the economy. Figure ES.7 report the top five challenges indicated by respondents when asked what is the most important challenge facing Columbus.

Public safety and crime continue to recede as challenges facing Columbus….

Figure ES.7
Most Important Challenges Facing the City of Columbus -- 1994-2002



…while economic issues are increasingly a primary concern of Columbus residents.

On the positive side, crime and public safety continue to recede as an important challenge facing the city. In 1994, 64% of respondents indicated that this was the most important challenge. In 2002, 17% of respondents report crime and public safety as the most important challenge, a drop from 22% only two years earlier in 2000.

Concern with issues of government performance appears to have stabilized. While 11% of respondents in 1994 and 13% in 1996 reported that the biggest challenge facing Columbus was poor government performance (i.e. inefficient government spending), this number has remained steady since. Only 8% of respondents in 2002 indicate that this is a major challenge.

5. Examples from the Columbus Covenant's Strategic Goals

In 2000, the City of Columbus adopted the Columbus Covenant, a set of principles and goals to guide the management of the City. The Columbus Covenant is reproduced below in Figure ES.8. This section reports examples from the 2002 survey that shed light on progress towards attaining the goals established in the Covenant

Figure ES.8
The Columbus Covenant 2000

Vision

To be the best city in the nation in which to live, work, and raise a family.

Mission

To provide leadership that will inspire: high standards of excellence in the delivery of city services; a spirit of cooperation, pride and responsibility to achieve strong, safe, and healthy neighborhoods; and, a shared economic prosperity and enhanced quality of life. We undertake this mission believing and knowing that we can make a difference for future generations.

Principles of Progress

- Prepare our city for the next generation
- Promote a diverse and vibrant economy that offers everyone an opportunity to share in our prosperity
- Delivery measurable, quality public services and results to our residents
- Advance our neighborhoods
- Challenge ourselves to realize our city's promise and potential

Strategic Goals

Neighborhoods	engage and promote strong, distinct, and vibrant neighborhoods
Safety	enhance the delivery of safety services
Downtown Development	develop a vibrant and thriving downtown that is recognized as an asset for the region
Economic Development and Technology	provide an atmosphere that promotes job creation and economic growth in existing and emerging industries
Education	encourage and promote participation in learning opportunities
Customer Service	provide quality and efficient service delivery to customers using "best practices"
Peak Performance	invest in all city employees and develop systems that support a high-performing city government

Neighborhoods

Table ES.2 reports the prevalence of various neighborhood problems. Note that respondents were asked about each type of problem independently. Respondents did not have to pick among these problems, but rather identified whether each one is a problem in their neighborhood.

Speeding is the most frequently identified neighborhood level problem.

Table ES.2
Prevalence of Neighborhood Level Problems

Speeding	57%
Overgrown Weeds	39%
Spilled Trash	34%
Vacant Houses and Buildings	30%
Run-Down Buildings	29%
Graffiti	24%
Abandoned Cars	21%

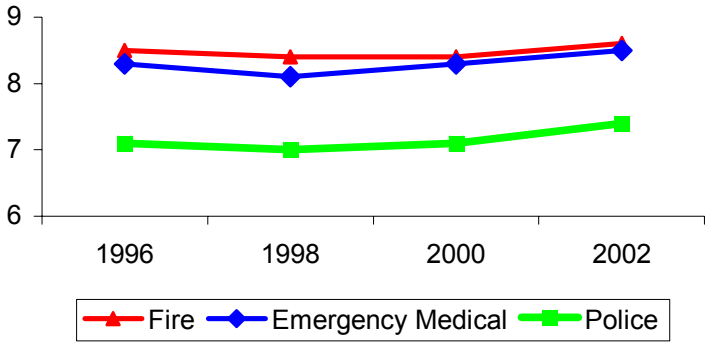
Speeding is far and away the most frequently identified neighborhood level problem. Over half of respondents indicate that speeding is a problem. About a third of respondents indicate that each of the following is a problem in their neighborhood: overgrown weeds (39%), spilled trash (34%), vacant houses and buildings (30%), and run-down buildings (29%). Around a quarter of respondents indicate that graffiti (24%) and abandoned cars (21%) are problems.

Safety

Ensuring public safety is a fundamental responsibility of all urban governments. The results from the 2002 survey suggest that Columbus is doing a good job on this front. Figure ES.9 shows the average rating for each of the three safety services –fire, emergency medical, and police – since 1996 on a 10-point scale, where 1 means "very poor quality" and 10 means "very high quality."

Figure ES.9
Quality of Safety Services 1996-2002

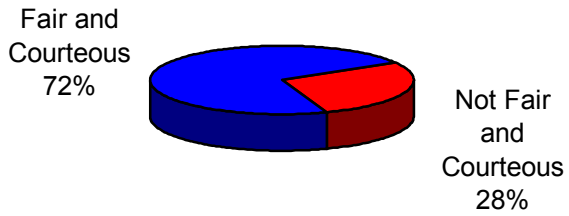
The quality of safety services continues to improve.



In addition, the survey results suggest that at the same time Columbus has continued to improve on the overall quality of safety services, it also gets high marks for the customer service in this area. Figure ES.10 reports the percentage of respondents who had been stopped by the police whether they were treated with fairness and courtesy. A vast majority of the 185 respondents who had been stopped by the police indicated that they were treated with fairness and courtesy.

Figure ES.10
Fairness and Courteousness of Police Employees when Stopped by the Police

The majority of respondents that interact with the Police believe that they are treated with fairness and courtesy.

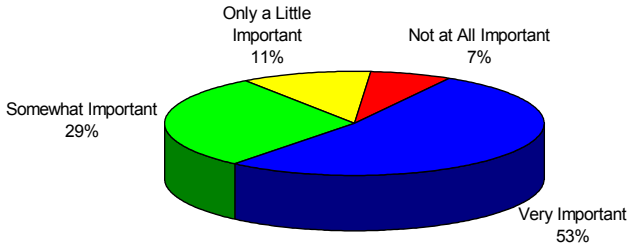


Downtown Development

The survey asked several questions about whether residents see downtown as an asset for the region. Figure ES.11 reports how important respondents think downtown development is for Columbus' future.

Figure ES.11
Importance of Downtown Development for Future of Columbus

The majority of respondents think that downtown is important for Columbus' future.



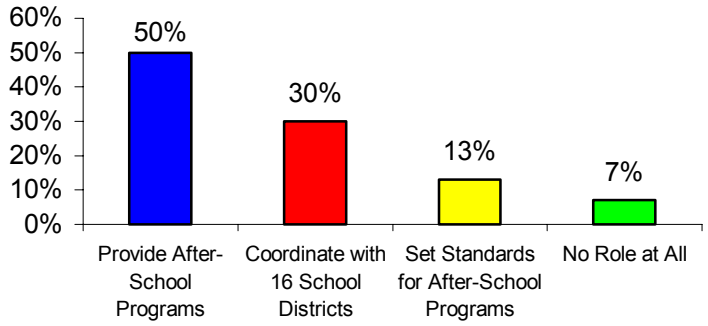
The overwhelming majority of respondents think that downtown development is either "very important" (53%) or "somewhat important" (29%) for the future of Columbus. Only 7% of respondents think it is "not at all important." This signals strong recognition of the importance of taking steps to make downtown vibrant and thriving.

Education

Most respondents think the City should provide after-school programs for kids…

The primary means by which the City can encourage and promote participation in learning opportunities is through the recently organized Office of Education. The primary goal of the Office is to support children in their education and in their transitions to higher education, work, family, and adult community. While the focus of the Office is to facilitate the education of children, the primary programmatic means by which to accomplish this goal remains unsettled. The 2002 survey asked respondents to prioritize among three activities the Office could undertake to help children receive a good education. Alternatively respondents could indicate that the city should have no role in education at all. Figure ES.12 reports the results.

Figure ES.12
Activities the City Should Undertake to Help Children Receive a Good Education



…and less than a tenth of respondents think the City should have no roll at all in education.

Half of respondents indicate that the City should directly provide after school programs. Another 13% indicate that the City should set standards for after-school programs. This suggests strong support for the Office directly delivering after-school educational programming to children, like the after-school model program Cap City Kids. Only 7% of respondents think the City should have no role at all.

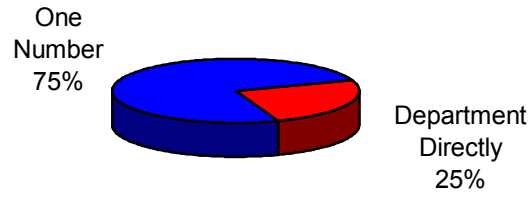
Customer Service

In an effort to improve the efficiency of responses to citizen inquiries, the City is implementing a 311 phone system. Rather than try to figure out on their own which department to call with a problem or question, citizens will now be able to call one number where an operator will direct their call to the appropriate department or city employee. Management experts argue that a 311 system will make it much easier for residents to navigate the City's bureaucracy.

The 2002 survey asks residents whether they would prefer to contact departments directly with a problem or question or to call one centralized number. Figure ES.13 reports the results to this question.

Three-fourths of respondents indicate that they would prefer the City's proposed 311 phone system.

Figure ES.13
Preference for Calling One Number or Contacting Departments Directly with a Question or Problem



Three-fourths of respondents indicate that they would prefer to call one number, suggesting strong support for the City's planned implementation of this customer service "best practice."

Peak Performance

Citizens often have good ideas about how to prioritize performance improvement efforts. Table ES.3 reports respondent opinions on how the City can do a better job.

Table ES.3
How the City Can Do a Better Job[1]

Better Involve Community in Decision-Making[2]	17%
Improve Community Conditions[3]	17%
Improve Overall Government Performance & Efficiency[4]	15%
Improve Transportation Management & Infrastructure[5]	12%
Improve Management & Operation of Safety Services[6]	11%
Improve Management of Schools	5%
Already Doing a Good Job	5%
Other	18%

Three-quarters of respondents have suggestions for how the City could improve performance...

Over 75% of participants in the survey provide at least one idea for how the City could do a better job. As Table ES.3 reports, respondents suggest a range of areas where the City should focus its performance improvements. Interestingly almost one-fifth of respondents indicate that the City could do a better job informing and involving the community in public decision-making. This is a fairly strong signal that many respondents feel they have little ability to influence the policy-making process.

[1] Multiple responses allowed. Table based on 928 valid responses.
[2] Category includes increase community involvement and keep public informed.
[3] Category includes improve neighborhoods, downtown & poor areas.
[4] Category includes project and budget efficiency & public employee performance.
[5] Category includes improve streets, safety, traffic, transportation & snow removal.
[6] Category includes more police, improve emergency response time & reduce crime.

6. Examples from Individual Departments

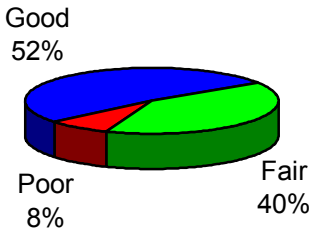
Many of the questions on the survey do not directly touch on the strategic priorities of the City. However, these questions provide critical information to departments about their performance, the awareness of citizens with their programs, and the usage of their services. This section reports highlights of these results by individual department.

Public Services Department

Respondents were asked to assess their ability to get from one place to another in those areas where there is no construction. This question was asked to gauge traffic flow throughout the City without biasing respondents towards complaining about construction, which is often designed to improve traffic flow. Figure ES.14 reports the results.

Respondents think traffic flow in Columbus is good or fair.

Figure ES.14
Ability to Get from One Place to Another

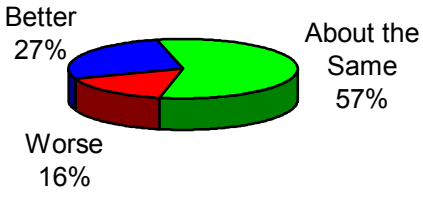


In general, respondents give traffic flow high marks. Over half of respondents rated their ability to get from one place to another as "good" and another 40% reported "fair". Less than one-tenth said their ability to get from once place to another was "poor".

In addition, a majority indicate that the condition of Columbus streets are "about the same" as those of other cities of similar size and around 27% indicate that they are "better". Only 17% indicate that they are "worse". Figure ES.15 displays these results graphically.

The condition of Columbus streets is about the same as that of cities of a similar size..

Figure ES.15
Condition of Columbus Streets Relative to Cities of a Similar Size

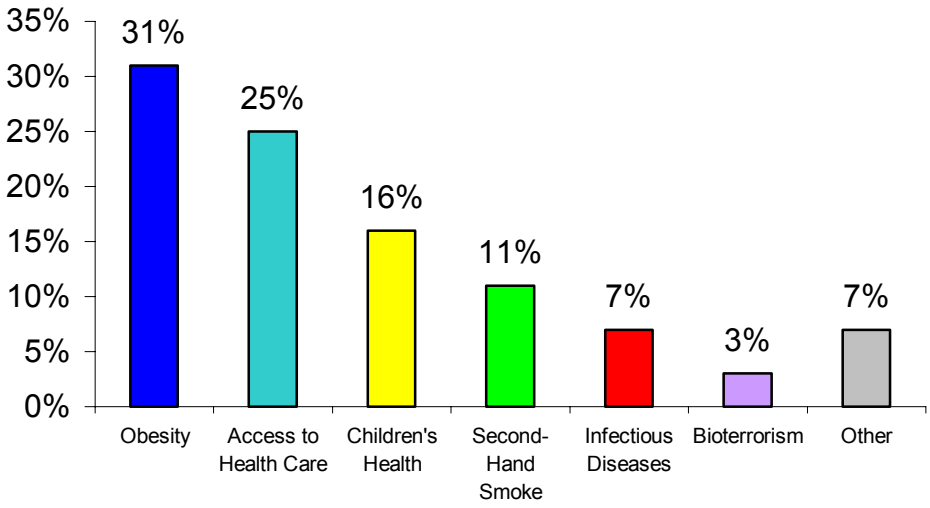


Health Department

The survey includes a key question regarding the Health Department's policy and programmatic concerns. Figure 5.49 reports respondent opinions about what the most important health issues in Columbus are.

Almost one-third of respondents think obesity is the most important health issue in Columbus…

Figure ES.16
Most Important Health Issues in Columbus



…and only 10% identify either infectious diseases or bio-terrorism.

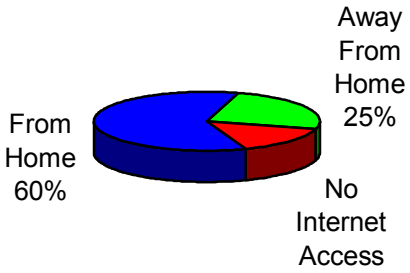
Responses to this question shed light on important health priorities in the community. Over 30% of respondents indicate that obesity is the primary health problem. This suggests that programs like "Commit to be Fit" have raised awareness about high levels of obesity. A quarter of respondents select access to health care, while one-sixth of respondents select children's health and one-tenth second-hand smoke. Interestingly, given the war-on-terrorism and the recent wave of anthrax scares only 7% select infectious disease and only 3% bio-terrorism. Seven-percent select some other health problem.

Technology Department

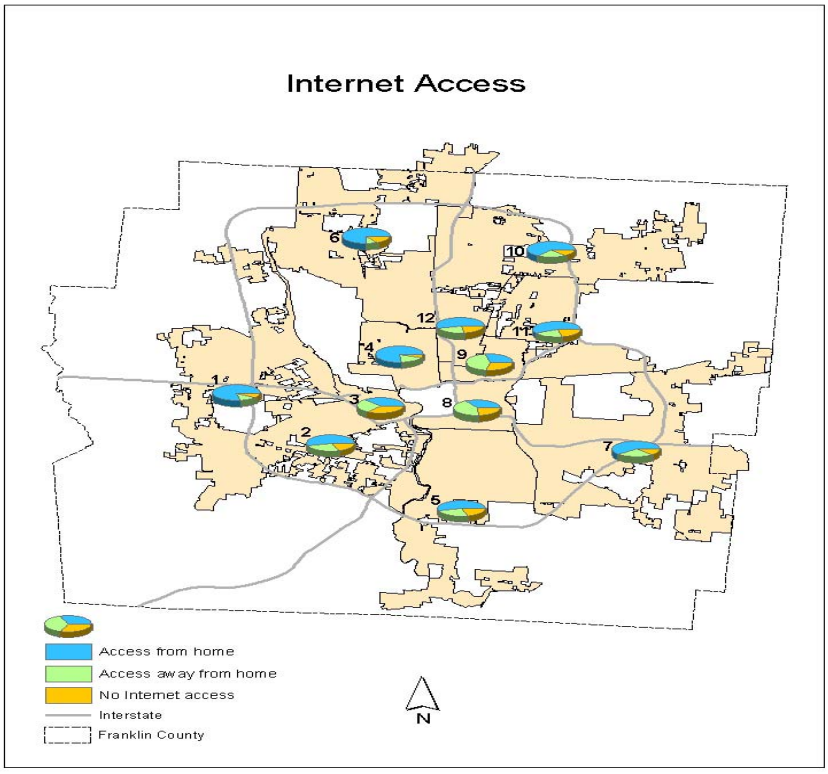
A key policy question for the Technology Department is whether residents have access to the internet. Columbus ranks high on internet access in national surveys (i.e. 8th in Yahoo's 2000 "Most Wired Cities" in terms of percentage of residents with internet access), and the 2002 survey provides support for this ranking. Figure ES.17 on the next page reports the percentage of respondents with internet access. Only 15% of respondents do not have internet access, while 60% have access from home and 25% have access from someplace else.

The majority of respondents have internet access either from home or someplace else...

Figure ES.17
Percentage of Respondents with and without Internet Access



While internet access is high, access varies across service districts. Figure ES.18 reports access across service districts. The districts around the outside of the City (1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10 & 11) all report home access above 50% and total access above 80% (home and away from home combined). In addition, the University/Village Area (4) district reports high levels of access either from home (76%) or away from home (19%). This is not surprising given that a large percentage of the residents in this district are students at Ohio State University. On the other hand, the central service districts (3, 8 & 9) all report access from home at less than 40% and total access less than 80%.

Figure ES.18

...although districts around the outside of the City report the highest levels of internet access.